

MR. ERSKINE'S
S P E E C H

ON THE

Trial of Thomas Williams,

On the Twenty-fourth of June, 1797;

FOR

Publiffing PAINE'S "*Age of Reason*,"

*The following admirable SPEECH of Mr. ERSKINE
as Counsel for the Prosecution, in the Trial of THOMAS
WILLIAMS for the Publication of a Libel, called
THE AGE OF REASON, by THOMAS PAINE,
deserves to be universally read and considered.—Though
the Religion of Christ need not the efforts of human
ingenuity to establish its truth, or confirm its excellence,
it is notwithstanding, gratifying to observe, that the
talents of almost all those whose exalted intellectual
acquirements command the respect and admiration of
mankind, have been either entirely or partially employed
in illustrating its doctrines, enforcing its precepts, ad-
ducing its evidences, or successfully repelling the attacks
of its enemies.*

“ GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY,

“ **T**HE charge of Blasphemy, which is put upon the record
against the Printer of this publication, is not an accu-
sation of the servants of the Crown, but comes before
you sanctioned by the oaths of a Grand Jury of the Country.
It stood for trial upon a former day; but it happening, as it
frequently does, without any imputation upon the gentlemen
named in the pannel, that a sufficient number, did not appear
to constitute a full Special Jury, I thought it my duty to
withdraw the cause from trial, till I could have the opportunity
which is now open to me of addressing myself to you, who were
originally appointed to try it. I pursued this course, however,
from no jealousy of the Common Juries, appointed by the
laws for the ordinary service of the Court, since my whole life
has been one continued experience of their virtues; but be-

cause I thought it of great importance, that those who were to decide upon a cause so very momentous to the public, should have the highest possible qualifications for the decision. That they should not only be men capable from their educations of forming an enlightened judgement, but that their situations should be such as to bring them within the full view of their enlightened country, to which in character and in estimation, they were in their own turns to be responsible.

"Not having the honour, gentlemen to be sworn for the King, as one of his Counsel, it has fallen much oftener to my lot to defend indictments for libels, than to assist in the prosecution of them. But I feel no embarrassment from that recollection; since I shall not be found to-day to express a sentiment, or to utter an expression inconsistent with those invaluable principles for which I have uniformly contended in the defense of others. Nothing that I have ever said, either professionally or personally for the Liberty of the Press, do I mean to-day to contradict or counteract. On the contrary, I desire to preface the very short discourse I have to make to you, with reminding you, that it is your most solemn duty to take care that it suffers no injury in your hands. A free and unlicensed press, (*in the just and legal sense of the expression*) has led to all the blessings both of Religion and Government, which Great-Britain or any part of the world at this moment enjoys, and is calculated still further to advance mankind to higher degrees of civilisation and happiness. But this freedom, like every other, must be limited to be enjoyed; and, like every human advantage, may be defeated by its abuse.

"Gentlemen! the Defendant stands indicted for having published this book, which I have only read from the obligations of professional duty, and which I rose from the reading of, with astonishment and disgust. Standing here with all the privileges belonging to the highest Counsel for the Crown, I shall be entitled to reply to any defense that shall be made for the publication. I shall wait with patience till I hear it. Indeed, if I were to anticipate the defense which I hear and read of, it would be defaming by anticipation the Learned Counsel who is to make it. For if I am to collect it, even from a formal notice given to the prosecutors in the course of the proceedings, I have to expect, that instead of a defense conducted according to the rules and principles of English law and justice, the foundation of all our laws, and the sanction of all our justice, are to be struck at and insulted. What is the force of that jurisdiction which enables the Court to sit in judgement? What but the oath which his Lordship, as well as yourselves, have sworn upon the Gospel to fulfil. Yet in

the King's Court, where his Majesty is himself also sworn to administer the justice of England—in the King's Court—who receives his high authority under a solemn oath to maintain the Christian Religion, as it is promulgated by God in the Holy Scriptures, I am nevertheless called upon, as Counsel for the prosecution, to produce a certain book described in the indictment to be the Holy Bible. No man deserves to be upon the Rolls of the Court, who dares, as an Attorney, to put his name to such a notice. It is an insult to the authority and dignity of the Court of which he is an officer; since it seems to call in question the very foundations of its jurisdiction.

"If this is to be the spirit and temper of the defense; if, as I collect from that array of books which are spread upon the benches behind me, this publication is to be vindicated by an attack of all the truths which the Christian Religion promulgates to mankind, let it be remembered that such an argument was neither suggested nor justified by any thing said by me on the part of the prosecution. *In this stage of the proceedings*, I shall call for reverence to the sacred Scriptures, not from their merits, unbounded as they are, but from their authority in a Christian country—not from the obligations of conscience, but from the rules of law. For my own part, Gentlemen, I have been ever deeply devoted to the truths of Christianity; and my firm belief in the Holy Gospel is by no means owing to the prejudices of education, (though I was religiously educated by the best of Parents;) but arises from the fullest and most continued reflections of my riper years and understanding. It forms, at this moment, the great consolation of a life, which, as a shadow, must pass away; and without it, indeed, I should consider my long course of health and prosperity, (perhaps too long and too uninterrupted to be good for any man,) only as the dust which the wind scatters, and rather as a snare than as a blessing. Much, however, as I wish to support the authority of Scripture from a reasoned consideration of it, I shall repress that subject for the present. But if the defense shall be, as I have suspected, to bring them at all into argument or question, I shall then fulfil a duty which I owe not only to the Court, as Counsel for the prosecution, but to the public, to state what I feel and know concerning the evidences of that Religion which is reviled without being examined, and denied without being understood.

"I am well aware, that by the communications of a free press, all the errors of mankind, from age to age, have been dissipated and dispelled; and I recollect that the world, under the banners of reformed Christianity, has struggled through persecution to the noble eminence on which it stands at this

moment, shedding the blessings of Humanity and Science upon the nations of the earth. It may be asked, by what means the Reformation would have been effected if the books of the Reformers had been suppressed, and the errors of condemned and exploded superstitions, had been supported as unquestionable by the State, founded upon those very superstitions formerly, as it is at present upon the doctrines of the Established Church? Or how, upon such principles, any reformation, civil or religious, can in future be effected? The solution is easy; Let us examine what are the genuine principles of the Liberty of the Press, as they regard writings upon general subjects, unconnected with the personal reputations of private men, which are wholly foreign to the present inquiry? They are full of simplicity, and are brought as near perfection, by the Law of England, as perhaps is consistent with any of the frail institutions of mankind.

“Although every community must establish supreme authorities, founded upon fixed principles, and must give high powers to Magistrates to administer laws for the preservation of the Government itself, and for the security of those who are to be protected by it; yet, as infallibility and perfection belong neither to human establishments nor to human individuals, it ought to be the policy of all free Establishments, as it is most peculiarly the principle of our own Constitution, to permit the most unbounded freedom of discussion, even by detecting errors in the Constitution or Administration of the very Government itself; so as that decorum is observed, which every state must exact from its subjects, and which imposes no restraint upon any intellectual composition, fairly, honestly, and decently addressed to the consciences and understandings of men.—Upon this principle I have an unquestionable right, (a right which the best subjects have exercised) to examine the principles and structure of the Constitution, and by fair, manly reasoning, to question the practice of its administrators. I have a right to consider and to point out errors in the one or in the other; and not merely to reason upon their existence, but to consider the means of their reformation. By such free, well-intentioned, modest, and dignified communication of sentiments and opinions, all nations have been gradually improved, and milder laws and purer religions have been established. The same principles, which vindicate civil contentions honestly directed, extend their protection to the sharpest controversies on religious faiths.

“This rational and legal course of improvement was recognised and ratified by Lord Kenyon, as the Law of England, in a late trial at Guildhall, when he looked back with grati-

tude to the labours of the Reformers, as the fountains of our religious emancipation, and of the civil blessings that followed in their train. The English Constitution, indeed, does not stop short in the toleration of religious *opinions*, but liberally extends it to *practice*. It permits every man, EVEN PUBLICLY, to worship God according to his own conscience, though in marked dissent from the national establishment, so as he professes the general faith, which is the sanction of all our moral duties, and the only pledge of our submission to the system which constitutes a State. Is not this freedom of controversy, and freedom of worship, sufficient for all the purposes of human happiness and improvement? And can it be necessary for either, that the law should hold out indemnity to those who wholly abjure and revile the Government of their Country, or the Religion on which it rests for its foundation?

“I expect to hear, in answer to what I am now saying, much that will offend me. My Learned Friend, from the difficulties of his situation, which, I know, from experience, how to feel for very sincerely, may be driven to advance propositions which it may be my duty, with much freedom, to reply to; and the Law will sanction that freedom. But will not the ends of justice be completely answered by that right, to point out the errors of his discourse, in terms that are decent, and calculated to expose its defects; or will any argument suffer, or will public justice be impeded, because neither private honour and justice, nor public decorum, would endure my telling my very Learned Friend, that he was a fool, a liar, and scoundrel, in the face of the Court, because I differed from him in argument or opinion? This is just the distinction between a book of free legal controversy and the book which I am arraigning before you. Every man has a legal right to investigate, with modesty and decency, controversial points of the Christian Religion; but no man, consistently with a law, which only exists under its sanctions, has a right not only broadly to deny its very existence, but to pour forth a shocking and insulting invective, which the lowest establishments, in the gradations of civil authority, ought not to be permitted to suffer, and which soon would be borne down by insolence and disobedience if they did.

“The same principle pervades the whole system of the law, not merely in its abstract theory, but in its daily and most applauded practice. The intercourse between the sexes, and which, properly regulated, not only continues, but humanizes and adorns our natures, is the foundation of all the thousand romances, plays, and novels, which are in the hands of every body. Some of them lead to the confirmation of every vit-

uous principle; others, though with the same profession, address the imagination in a manner to lead the passions into dangerous excesses. But though the Law does not nicely discriminate the various shades which distinguish these works from one another, so as that it suffers many to pass, through its liberal spirit, that upon principle might be suppressed, would it or does it tolerate, or does any decent man contend that it ought to pass by unpunished, libels of the most shameless obscenity, manifestly pointed to debauch innocence, and to blast and poison the morals of the rising generation? This is only another illustration to demonstrate the obvious distinction between the work of an author, who fairly exercises the powers of his mind, in investigating doctrinal points in the religion of any country, and him who attacks the rational existence of every religion, and brands with absurdity and folly the State which sanctions, and the obedient tools who cherish the delusion. But this publication appears to me to be as mischievous and cruel in its probable effects, as it is manifestly illegal in its principles; because it strikes at the best; sometimes, alas! the only refuge and consolation amidst the distresses and afflictions of the world. The poor and humble, whom it affects to pity, may be stabbed to the heart by it. They have more occasion for firm hopes beyond the grave, than those who have greater comforts to render life delightful. I can conceive a distressed but virtuous man, surrounded by children, looking up to him for bread, when he has none to give them, looking under the last day's labour, and unequal to the next, yet still looking up with confidence to the hour when all tears shall be wiped from the eyes of affliction, bearing the burthen laid upon them by a mysterious Providence which he adores, and looking forward with exultation to the revealed promises of his Creator, when he shall be greater than the greatest, and happier than the happiest of mankind. What a change in such a mind might not be wrought by such a merciless publication? Gentlemen! whether these remarks are the overcharged declamations of an accusing Counsel, or the just reflections of a man anxious for the public freedom, which is best secured by the morals of a nation, will be best settled by an appeal to the passages in the work, that are selected by the indictment for your consideration and judgment. You are at liberty to connect them with every context and sequel, and to bestow upon them the mildest interpretation.—[Here Mr. Erskine read and commented upon several of the selected passages, and then proceeded as follows:—] Gentlemen, it would be useless and disgusting to enumerate the other passages within the scope of the indictment. How any man can rationally vindicate the publication of such a book, in a

country where the Christian Religion is the very foundation of the law of the land, I am totally at a loss to conceive, and have no ideas for the discussion of? How is the tribunal, whose whole jurisdiction is founded upon the solemn belief and practice of what is denied as falsehood, and reprobated as impiety to deal with such anomalous defense? Upon what principle is it even offered to the Court, whose authority is contemned and mocked at? If the religion proposed to be called in question, is not previously adopted in belief and solemnly acted upon, what authority has the Court to pass any judgment at all of acquittal or condemnation? Why am I now, or upon any other occasion, to submit to your Lordship's authority? Why am I now, or at any time to address twelve of my equals, as I am now addressing you with reverence and submission? Under what sanction are the witnesses to give their evidence, without which there can be no trial? Under what obligations can I call upon you, the Jury representing your Country, to administer justice! Surely upon no other than that you are sworn to administer it under the oaths you have taken. The whole judicial fabrick, from the King's sovereign authority to the lowest office of magistracy has no other foundation. The whole is built, both in form and substance, upon the same oath of every one of its ministers to do justice AS GOD SHALL HELP THEM HEREAFTER. What God? and what hereafter? That God, undoubtedly, who has commanded Kings to rule, and Judges to decree with justice; who has said to witnesses, not by the voice of nature, but in revealed commandments—THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR; and who has enforced obedience to them by the revelation of blessings which shall attend their observances, and the awful punishments which shall await upon their transgressions. But it seems, this is an Age of Reason, and the time and the person are at last arrived, that are to dissipate the errors which have overspread the past generations of ignorance. The believers in Christianity are many, but it belongs to the few that are wise to correct their credulity. Belief is an act of reason, and superior reason may, therefore, dictate to the weak. In running the mind along the long list of sincere and devout Christians, I cannot help lamenting, that Newton had not lived to this day, to have had his shallowness filled up by this new flood of light. But the subject is too awful for irony. I will speak plainly and directly. Newton was a Christian! Newton, whose mind burst forth from the fetters cast by nature upon our finite conceptions—Newton, whose science was truth, and the foundation of whose knowledge of it was philosophy. Not those visionary and arrogant presumptions, which too often usurp

its name, but philosophy resting upon the basis of mathematics, which, like figures, cannot lie. Newton, who carried the line and rule to the uttermost barriers of creation, and explored the principles by which, no doubt, all created matter is held together and exists. But this extraordinary man, in the mighty reach of his mind, overlooked, perhaps, the errors, which a minuter investigation of the created things on this earth might have taught him of the essence of his Creator. What shall then be said of the great Mr. Boyle, who looked into the Organic Structure of all Matter, even to the brute inanimate substances, which the foot treads on. Such a man may be supposed to have been equally qualified with Mr. Pain to look through Nature up to Nature's God. Yet the result of all his contemplation was the most confirmed and devout belief in all which the other holds in contempt, as despicable and drivelling superstition. But this error might, perhaps, arise from a want of due attention to the foundations of human judgment, and the structure of that understanding which God has given us for the investigation of truth. Let that question be answered by Mr. Locke, who was to the highest pitch of devotion and adoration, a Christian. Mr. Locke, whose office was to detect the errors of thinking, by going up to the fountains of thought, and to direct into the proper track of reasoning, the deviating mind of man, by showing him its whole process, from the first perceptions of sense to the last conclusion of ratiocination, putting a rein besides upon false opinion, by practical rules for the conduct of human judgment. But these men were only deep thinkers, and lived in their closets, unaccustomed to the traffic of the world, and to the laws which practically regulate mankind.

"Gentlemen! in the place where we now sit to administer the justice of this great country, above a century ago, the never to be forgotten Sir Matthew Hale presided; whose faith in Christianity is an exalted commentary upon its truth and reason, and whose life was a glorious example of its fruits in man, administering human justice with a wisdom and purity drawn from the pure fountain of the Christian dispensation, which has been, and will be, in all ages, a subject of the highest reverence and admiration. But it is said by the Author, that the Christian fable is but the tale of the more ancient superstitions of the world, and may be easily detected by a proper understanding of the Mythologies of the Heathens. Did not Milton understand those mythologies? Was he less versed than Mr. Pain in the superstitions of the world? No, they were the subject of his immortal song; and though shut out from all recurrence to them, he poured them forth from the stores of a

memory rich with all that man ever knew, and laid them in order as the illustration of that real and exalted faith, the unquestionable source of that fervid genius, which cast a sort of shade upon all the other works of man—

He passed the bounds of flaming space,
Where Angels tremble while they gaze;
He saw, till blasted with excess of light
He closed his eyes in endless night.

But it was the light of the body only that was extinguished; "The celestial light shone inward, and enabled him to justify the ways of God to man." The result of his thinking was nevertheless not the same as the Author's. The mysterious incarnation of our blessed Saviour (which this work blasphemes in words so wholly unfit for the mouth of a Christian, or for the ear of a Court of Justice, that I dare not, and will not give them utterance) Milton made the grand conclusion of the *Paradise Lost*, the rest from his finished labours and the ultimate hope, and expectation, and glory of the world,

A Virgin is his Mother, but his Sire,
The Power of the Most High; he shall ascend,
The Throne hereditary, and bound his reign
With Earth's wide bounds, his glory with the Heav'ns.

"The immortal Poet having thus put into the mouth of the Angel, the prophecy of man's redemption, follows it with the solemn and beautiful admonition, addressed in the poem to our great first parent, but intended as an address to his posterity through all generations.

This having learn'd, thou hast attain'd the sum
Of Wisdom; hope no higher, tho' all the stars
Thou knew'st by name, and all th' ethereal pow'rs,
All secrets of the deep, all Nature's works,
Or works of God in heav'n, air, earth or sea,
And all the riches of this world enjoyd'st,
And all the rule, one empire; only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,
Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love,
By name to come call'd Charity, the Soul
Of all the rest: Then wilt thou not be loth
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A Paradise within thee, happier far.

"Thus you find all that is great, or wise, or splendid, or illustrious, amongst created beings; all the minds gifted beyond

ordinary nature, if not inspired by its universal author for the advancement and dignity of the world, though divided by distant ages, and the clashing opinions, distinguishing them from one another, yet joining as it were in one sublime chorus, to celebrate the truths of Christianity, and laying upon its holy altars the never-fading offerings of their immortal wisdom.

"Against all this concurring testimony, we find suddenly, from the author of this book, that the Bible teaches nothing but 'lies, obscenity, cruelty, and injustice.' Had the author, or publisher, ever read the Sermon of Christ upon the Mount, in which the great principles of our faith and duty are summed up?—Let us all but read and practise it, and lies, obscenity, cruelty, and injustice, and all human wickedness would be banished from the world!"

"There is but one consideration more, which I cannot possibly omit, because I confess it affects me very deeply. The author of this book has written largely on public Liberty and Government; and this last performance has, on that account, been more widely circulated, and principally among those who attached themselves from principle to his former works. This circumstance renders a public attack upon *all revealed Religion*, from such a writer, infinitely more dangerous. The religious and moral sense of the People of Great-Britain, is the great anchor which alone can hold the vessel of the State amidst the storms which agitate the world; and if I could believe for a moment, that the mass of the people were to be debauched from the principles of Religion, which forms the true basis of that humanity, charity, and benevolence, that has been so long the national characteristic, instead of mixing myself, as I sometimes have done, in political reformations, I would rather retire to the uttermost corner of the earth, to avoid their agitation; and would bear, not only the imperfections and abuses complained of in our own wise establishment, but even the worst Government that ever existed in the world, rather than go to the work of reformation with a multitude set free from all the charities of Christianity, who had no sense of God's existence; but from Mr. Pain's *Observation of Nature*, which the mass of mankind have no leisure to contemplate; nor any belief, of future rewards and punishments, to animate the good in the glorious pursuit of human happiness, nor to deter the wicked from destroying it even in its birth.

"But I know the People of England better—They are a religious People, and with the blessing of God, as far as it is in my power, I will lend my aid to keep them so. I have no objections to the freest and most extended discussions upon doctrinal points of the Christian Religion, and *though the law of England*

~~when not permitted~~ it, I do not dread the reasoned arguments of Deists against the existence of Christianity itself, because, as was said by its Divine Author, if it be of God, it will stand.—An intellectual book, however erroneous, addressed to the intellectual world upon so profound and complicated a subject, can never work the mischief which this indictment is calculated to repress. Such works will only employ the minds of men enlightened by study, to a deeper investigation of a subject well worthy of their deepest and continued contemplation.—The powers of the mind are given for human improvement, in the progress of human existence. The changes produced by such reciprocations of lights and intelligences, are certain in their progressions, and make their way imperceptibly, as conviction comes upon the world, by the final and irresistible power of truth. If Christianity be founded in falsehood, let us become Deists in this manner, and I am contented. But this book has no such object, and no such capacity: it presents no arguments to the wise and enlightened. On the contrary, it treats the faith and opinions of the wisest with the most shocking contempt, and stirs up men without the advantage of learning, or sober thinking, to a total disbelief of every thing hitherto held sacred; and consequently to a rejection of all the laws and ordinances of the State, which stand only upon the assumption of their truth.

“Gentlemen! I cannot conclude without expressing the deepest regret at all attacks upon the Christian Religion, by authors who profess to promote the civil liberties of the world. For under what other auspices than Christianity, have the lost and subverted liberties of mankind in former ages been re-asserted? By what zeal but the warm zeal of devout Christians, have English Liberties been redeemed and consecrated? Under what other sanctions, even in our own days, have liberty and happiness been extending and spreading to the uttermost corners of the earth? What work of civilisation, what commonwealth of greatness, has this bald Religion of Nature ever established? We see, on the contrary, the nations that have no other light than that of Nature to direct them, sunk in barbarism, or slaves to arbitrary Governments; whilst, since the Christian æra the great career of the world has been slowly, but clearly advancing, lighter at every step, from the awful prophecies of the Gospel; and leading I trust, in the end, to universal and eternal happiness. Each generation of mankind can see but a few revolving links of this mighty and mysterious chain; but, by doing our several duties in our allotted stations, we are sure, that we are fulfilling the purposes of our existence. You, I trust, will fulfil yours this day!”

[On the speech made by the Counsel for the Defendant, Mr. Erskine's reply, and Lord Kenyon's observations, furnish the only proper observations.]

Mr. Erskine made a most eloquent reply. He said, he was bound, in respect to his Learned Friend, as a Member of a most honourable profession, to *suppose*, that he was placed in a very irksome situation, to be called on for a defence so exceedingly difficult to make, and so extremely delicate to manage, without violating that common decency that was due to a Court of Justice. He could not, therefore, help considering him as entitled to a considerable degree of indulgence. Mr. Erskine here adverted to several of the passages selected from the Old Testament, and proceeded to explain the reason of their introduction into the sacred writings.—The history of man, he said, was the history of man's vices and passions, which could not be censured without adverting to their existence; and many of the instances that had been referred to, were recorded as memorable warnings and examples for the instruction of mankind.

Mr. Erskine next adverted most forcibly and deeply to the evidences of Christianity, particularly those that were founded on that stupendous scheme of prophecy, which formed one of the most unanswerable arguments for the truth of the Christian Religion. "It was not," he said "the purpose of God to destroy free agency by over-powering the human mind with the irresistible light, and conviction of Revelation; but to leave men to collect its truths, as they were gradually illustrated in the accomplishment of the Divine promises of the Gospel.—Bred as he was to the consideration of evidence, he declared he considered the prophecy concerning the destruction of the Jewish nation, if there was nothing else to support Christianity, absolutely irresistible. The division of the Jews into tribes, to preserve the genealogy of Christ, the distinction of the tribe of Judah, from which he was to come; the loss of that distinction when that end was accomplished; the predicted departure of the sceptre from Israel; the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, which Imperial munificence in vain attempted to rebuild to disgrace the prophecy; the dispersion of this nation over the face of the whole earth; the spreading of the Gospel throughout the world; the persecutions of its true Ministers; and the foretold superstitions which for ages had defiled its worship—these were topicks upon which Mr. Erskine expatiated with great eloquence, and produced a most powerful effect on every part of the audience. He concluded with a vindication of the authors of this prosecution. He said, they were men of the highest character and greatest consideration

in the Country. Many of them were charged with the offices of Religion; others of them were cloathed with the robes of Magistracy; most of them were men of deep learning and thinking; and all of them justly entitled to the thanks of the Public for their noble exertions in the cause of Religion and Virtue.



LORD KENYON's CHARGE.

"GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY,

"Being now in possession of all the facts of this case, and convinced, in my own mind, what conclusion ought to be drawn from them, I am not sure that it is necessary to say any thing at all to you upon the subject. Gentlemen, before you proceed to decide on the merits of this or any other cause, it is proper to see whether the parties litigating stand in a fair light before you. I was extremely hurt when the learned Counsel for the Defendant thought fit to state to you, with very considerable emphasis, and a very determined tone of voice, that this was a scandalous prosecution. I cannot help wishing that sentence had not been uttered. Who commenced this prosecution I certainly know not. But from what fell from the very learned Counsel who has just sat down, I am inclined to suppose it proceeded from a Society of Gentlemen instituted for the most important of all purposes, for preserving the morals of the people; a society composed of Clergymen and Laymen of the most respectable characters in the kingdom; who, feeling how the country is over-run with profligacy and wickedness, which boldly raise their heads in defiance of the law of the land, were determined to see whether, in the first place, by admonition and advice, they could not stop the torrent of vice and immorality; and secondly if that should

fail, to try what could be done by punishment. If people with the very best intentions carry on prosecutions that are oppressive, the end may not always perhaps sanctify the means. But the manner in which this prosecution has been conducted, is certainly not oppressive; for instead of proceeding in the more expensive mode, the Prosecutors went before a Grand Jury of the country: and it was necessary to obtain the opinion of that Grand Jury before the party could be put in process.

Gentlemen! we sit here in a Christian Assembly to administer the laws of the land, and I am to take my knowledge of what the law is from that which has been sanctioned by a great variety of legal decisions. I am bound to state to you what my predecessors in Mr. Woolston's case (2 Strange, 134) stated half a century ago, in this Court of which I am an humble Member; namely, that the Christian Religion is part of the law of the land. Christianity from its earliest institution met with its opposers. Its professors were very soon called upon to publish their apologies for the doctrines they had embraced. In what manner they did that, and whether they had the advantage of their adversaries, or sunk under the superiority of their arguments, mankind for near two thousand years have had an opportunity of judging. They have seen what Julian, Justin Martyr, and other Apologists have written, and have been of opinion the argument was in favour of those very publications. The world has been lately favoured with another apology from a most learned and respectable Prelate, who calls his work *An Apology for the Christian Religion*. I shall not decide between the merits of the one and the other. The publications themselves are in the hands of the world; and I sincerely wish in the concluding language of the work to which I have just referred (I do not affect to use the very words) I sincerely wish that the author of the work in question may become partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which he has so grossly defamed, and may be enabled to make his Peace with God for that disorder which he has endeavoured to the utmost of his power to introduce into Society. We have heard to-day, that the light for Nature, and the contemplation of the works of creation are sufficient without any other revelation of the divine will. Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Tully—each of them in their turns professed they wanted other lights; and knowing and professing that God was good, they took it for granted the time would come, when he would impart a farther revelation of his will to mankind. Though they walked as it were through a cloud, darkly, they hoped their posterity would almost see God face to face. This condition of mankind has met with reprehension to-day.

"I shall not pursue this argument. Fully impressed with the great truths of religion, which, thank God, I was taught in my early years to believe, and of which the hour of reflection and inquiry, instead of producing any doubt, has fully confirmed me in; I expected the learned Counsel for the Defendant would have differed the case of the Publisher from that of the Author of this work; that he would have endeavoured to convince you that whatever guilt might belong to the Author nothing was imputable to the publisher. He has to my utter surprise, exactly reversed the case. He tells you it was originally published at Paris in 1794; that the feelings of the Author's friends were wounded by this work, which I call a nefarious publication, and that it was in a great measure forgotten; and you are now called upon to judge of the merits or demerits of the Publisher, who has brought forth a still-born work, forgotten by every body, till he ventured, in defiance of the verdicts of mankind on the Author's political works, to send it forth among the inhabitants of this country. Unless it was for the most malignant purposes, I cannot conceive why it was published. It is, however, for you to judge of it, and to do justice between the Public and the Defendant."

The Jury instantly found the Defendant—GUILTY.